



**DAVIS
SQUARE**
ARCHITECTS

240A Elm Street
Somerville, MA 02144
617.628.5700, tel
davissquarearchitects.com

Brooks A. Mostue, AIA
Clifford J. Boehmer, AIA
Ross A. Speer, AIA
Iric L. Rex, AIA

October 26, 2018

Michael Zehner, Planning Director
TOWN OF WELLESLEY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
525 Washington Street
Wellesley, MA 02482

Re: Preliminary Architectural Review
148 Weston Road

Dear Michael:

In anticipation of the next ZBA hearing for the proposed development at 148 Weston Road which is scheduled for next Tuesday, October 30, I am providing you with a preliminary review of the project based on documents that have been provided directly to me, documents retrievable from the Town's website, and my impressions from a site visit and brief meeting with you and the developer on September 25, 2018.

Because the project's design is very schematic at this point, my comments are limited in detail. As was the case with my first review of the proposed Delanson Road development, my focus, pending further project development, is on broader issues, mainly looking at how the proposed project fits into the existing context, impact to immediate abutters, scale mitigation strategies, perception from the public realm, etc. Once the project "fundamentals" of massing, setbacks, stepbacks, buffers, on-site amenities, etc. are settled on, it will make sense to look more closely at architectural language, materials, and so on.

The format of this review will follow the Scope of Services outline that was provided to the Town, as follows:

Review the developer's application, plans and drawings:

For this report, I have reviewed the following documents:

Project Application Materials

- Application for Chapter 40B Project Eligibility Letter from MassHousing dated January 2, 2018.
- 148 Weston Road Proposed Waiver List.
- Development Team summary sheet.
- Geotechnical Summary Report dated February 14, 2018.
- Project Narrative (undated).
- Project Data Summary.
- Wellesley Park Proposed Waiver List.
- Zoning Overview diagram prepared by Embarc dated August 30, 2017.
- Letter to Jonathan BeritParkes from Julie Meyer (Wetlands Protection Committee) dated February 5, 2018.
- Transportation Impact Assessment Summary (slideshow) dated March 20, 2018 prepared by VAI.
- Letter to ZBA from Jeffrey Dirk (VAI) dated October 9, 2018 re: Response to Transportation Peer Review Commentary.
- Site development set of drawings (6 sheets) dated February 15, 2018 prepared by McKenzie Engineering Group (civil engineer).
- Drawing set "148 Weston Road, Planning Board Submission" (21 sheets) dated February 15, 2017 (mis-dated?) prepared by Embarc Architecture and Design.
- Drawing set "148 Weston Road, Planning Board Submission" (23 sheets) dated September 11, 2018 prepared by Embarc Architecture and Design.

Correspondence from the public and consultant to public

- Letter to ZBA from Michael Robert Cave (undated).

Participate in an initial meeting at the site with the developer's design team and a representative of the Town:

This reviewer visited the site and surveyed neighboring areas on Tuesday, September 25th. Following the walkthrough, there was a meeting attended by this reviewer, the developer and his architect, and you to discuss 148 Weston and the Delanson Road projects.

Discussions included potential future development of the significant open space adjacent to the site to the west, existing and proposed site grading, the nearness of the project to the neighbor on Weston Road, tight setbacks on (particularly on the north and west side of the project) and the possibility that the small scale amenity building on the street may be eliminated in order to provide more surface parking. At the walkthrough, the project architect provided the September 11, 2018 set of drawings that includes a Landscape Site Plan that indicates 23 parking spaces in the "front yard" in lieu of the small scale amenity building shown in previous plans. The September 11 set also includes the original site plan. This reviewer's presumption is that both options are still under consideration.

Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas close to the project site:

The project is located on the fourth single family home site on the west side of Weston Road to the north of the railroad bridge. Directly across the street to the north and south (until the intersection with Linden Street), there are small scale single family homes, generally with relatively significant setbacks from the street. On the same side of the street to the north and following the path of the railroad, there is a very large tract(s) of open space, with development limited to a community garden and the Crosstown Trail.

Generally, the western end of Linden Street is the "dividing line" between small scale, single family home development, and larger scale multi-family and commercial development. As such, the proposed project site is "almost" a transitional site, separated from Linden street by several single family homes on both sides of Weston Road. Another way to express this is that the proposed project would represent an extension of the multi-family/commercial uses into the single family home neighborhood.

Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate:

There has been no communication regarding the project since the September 25th site visit and meeting.

Provide an oral presentation to the ZBA within approximately one month of the notice to proceed. Said presentation shall include comments and preliminary recommendations on the following (the following comments in italics will be presented to the ZBA at the October 30, 2018 hearing):

- a. Orientation of building in relation to parking areas, open space and on-site amenities. As noted above, two very different site plans have been provided. In one, all but six parking spaces are located in an underground parking area, not visible from the street or neighbors. In the scheme with 6 spaces (plus a delivery area), there is a discrete, small scale amenity building set back roughly in alignment with the neighboring single family home. Other amenities indicated on the plans include a pergola and outdoor seating areas, a Trail access stairway, and in the September 11 site plan, a children's play structure.

Because the main building is set far back from the street and the frontage is occupied with parking and vehicular circulation (or the amenity building), and because the north and west setbacks on the large part of the site are minimal, all of the outdoor site amenities are located on the roof of the underground parking structure on the south side of the building. This outdoor amenity area abuts the rear yard of the neighboring home on Weston Road. The open area of the parking garage roof also functions as a dead-end fire lane.

It is this reviewer's opinion is that the original scheme that includes the discrete amenity structure is the more successful. Providing virtually all parking (with the exception of necessary paved delivery/entry court/turnaround area, visitor parking, etc.) at a basement level is a good strategy for making the best use of the site and screening the view of parking. In addition, the proposed small scale amenity structure creates a foreground element that helps to screen the large residential structure (and the large parking garage door) from the street, and has the

potential to tie the development into the existing development pattern on Weston Road. This is a superior approach compared to the creation of a parking lot in the front setback.

- b. *Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas. As noted above, the usable on-site open space is limited to a section of the parking garage roof. By minimizing site setbacks, particularly on the west and north frontage, the site strategy is essentially to visually appropriate currently undeveloped open space outside of the project site. There are several issues with this approach. Most importantly, the scale of the setbacks does not allow on-site landscape buffering. Proposed tree buffering is existing, located on the neighboring sites. This could be a very bad long-term decision given no assurances of how those sites may be developed in the future. In addition, construction activities on the 148 site may damage or kill what is currently effective screening. Independent of concerns about future development, some feel that the existing buffering on the west side is not adequate to mitigate the impact of the proposed structure on the Crosstown Trail.*

The minimal "maintenance strip" setbacks also limit the ability to access the facades of the building, whether for emergency access or routine work on the building (if it hasn't happened yet, the narrow setbacks and dead-end fire lane should be reviewed by the Fire Department). Also, while it may be argued that the programmed open site areas are adequate for the target resident population, all of the uses and their impact are concentrated adjacent to the existing neighbor. By contrast, usable open space on the west side of the building could accommodate active areas with minimal neighbor impact, while providing a meaningful link to the existing trail system (which was a suggestion included in the Project Eligibility Letter).

There does not appear to be any outdoor bicycle parking on either of the potential site plans. Also, resident pedestrian access to off-site amenities is limited because of the absence of a sidewalk on the west side of Weston Road, with no easy access to a cross walk to get to the sidewalk on the east side of the street. A sidewalk on the project side of the street that led to the existing Linden Street crosswalk would address this issue (this off site amenity is mentioned in the Transportation Improvement Program).

- c. *Use and treatment of natural resources. The site has a large depression at about 2/3 of the way towards the rear that dips down approximately to the garage level. It rises up again towards the western boundary until it reaches a grade very close to the existing along Weston Road. It appears that there will be export of material in order to create the parking garage. The foundation walls that run on the north and south sides, as well as half of the west wall will be designed to retain the existing grades on the adjacent sites. It appears that it may also be necessary to build a retaining wall along the western property line in order to create garage level and garage roof access to the Trail from the southwest corner of the site.*

As noted above, there is concern that construction of the parking structure could damage existing trees on the adjacent properties. This should be studied by the developer, and an appropriate tree protection plan must be developed (note that the developer is seeking a waiver from the Tree Protection & Mitigation Plan).

- d. *Building design, setbacks, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography. Clearly, the proposed structure is grossly out of scale with the existing nearby single family homes, as well as the multi-family buildings along Linden Street. While we do not yet have access to a 3-D computer model to help with assessing impact on the neighborhood, the ground-level perspective images provided in the project documentation indicate a strong presence of the primary structure, even though it is well set back from Weston Road. While the future of the site to the west may be unknown at this point, the minimal setback at that end of the building precludes any on-site landscape buffering.*

In addition to the severe buffering limitations that the proposed building placement create, the proposed massing of the structure does little to minimize its perceived scale. There is inadequate articulation of the footprint, exacerbated by very little movement in the massing in the building's vertical section. The blocky, small gestures made with large pieces preclude any reading of "residential". This is apparent in the rendered view from Weston Road that gives the impression of an office structure incongruously sited behind a small cottage. There is a disconnect between the language of the two pieces (and with the other small homes on Weston Road) that

is a lost opportunity to work towards tying the development into the neighborhood. On the other sides of the building, the minimal setbacks don't allow any tie in of the project with the neighboring sites.

While concurring with the opinion that this site can be suitable for multi-family use, it is this reviewer's opinion that in order to successfully mitigate the impact of this project, and in the best case create a development that truly enhances the neighborhood, some very large changes to the project design...initially in the site plan and building massing...need to be considered. This opinion is shared by MassHousing, who states in their PEL that "The Applicant should respond to concerns regarding the size and scale of the proposed multi-family building and its impact on the character of the surrounding neighborhood by reassessing the effectiveness of building massing and setbacks, and should at a minimum improve vegetative screening along the border of the Site and adjacent structures." The most important first steps are:

- In order to "improve vegetative screening", the parking garage and any other retaining walls need more setback from property lines. Consideration should be given, as noted above, to the creation of programmable open space on the west side of the building (which would also address MassHousing's suggestion related to enhancing the connection to the Trail).
- The massing of the residential structure that sits on top of the parking garage needs to be broken up into residential size blocks through meaningful articulation of the building footprint and building section.
- Efforts should be made to create building scale, massing, and language links between the "carriage house" amenity building and the residential block. Tying the two together will help to make a project typology that has the potential to enhance the neighborhood.

It is this reviewer's opinion that after these setback and massing suggestions have been studied, it will be appropriate to undertake a more detailed analysis of the buildings' language and materiality.

- e. Viewsheds of the project visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods. See comments above regarding views from Weston Road and the surrounding sites.
- f. Pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation; adequacy of accessibility provisions. Of particular interest are the implications of access and egress in terms of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Adequacy of parking facilities. As has been stated above, the two-building scheme with an intermediate service courtyard has better potential for addressing typical functional requirements, as well as helping to mitigate the impact of the larger building and making an effective tie in to the street. A more detailed plan that includes bicycle parking, defined turnaround areas, detailed description of amenity building programming, etc. ...all with buy-in from the Fire Department...will allow further discussion of these issues.

Accessibility of all amenities is likely very straightforward with regard to the main structure and the amenity building. Access to the path to the Trail needs more definition. As discussed above, an extension of the Weston Road sidewalk to the crosswalk at the bridge would be a significant enhancement to the project.

- g. Integration of building and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover, if any. See discussion above. As currently planned, the parking structure is tightly squeezed into the site with inadequate regard to integration or impact to neighboring sites.
- h. Exterior materials. There are images of proposed materials and call-outs included on the building elevation sheets. These are generally suitable for this neighborhood, and will be more effective once issues of massing and scale are addressed.
- i. Energy efficiency. Not yet reviewable. Wellesley has adopted the Stretch Code, so the project will be subject to a high level of energy efficiency. There are many more options available to the developer to create buildings that exceed the Stretch Code that are available with relatively insignificant increase in construction cost (but with big impact on minimizing ongoing operating expenses).
- j. Exterior lighting. Not yet reviewable.

- k. Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design. *Two different landscape plans are included in the submitted materials. As noted above, there are important questions about feasibility of buffers and protection of existing trees.*
- l. Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings. *See paragraph "i" above.*
- m. Any other design-related considerations identified by the consultant, other peer reviewers, ZBA, staff, working group, neighbors, or consultants to neighbors. *As of this date, there have been no working sessions. However, other design-related issues/considerations have been raised, including:*
- *It is not clear to this reviewer how trash and recycling will be handled.*
 - *Individual unit floor plans were not provided to this reviewer (and there is a very large variety of sizes and orientations indicated on the overall floor diagrams).*
 - *Which units are proposed to be affordable, and which are Group 2 accessible?*
 - *Method for construction of retaining walls, particularly when near property lines, should be specified.*
 - *Has a school bus waiting area been provided?*
 - *Transportation Improvement Plan does not include mention of on-site car sharing options (although courtyard space would be ideal Uber/Lyft pick up location).*
 - *Where do visitors arriving on bicycles park?*
 - *A detailed construction staging plan should be submitted to confirm basic construction feasibility (virtually the entire site would be under construction given current plans).*
 - *A lighting plan should be submitted for review of potential impact on neighbors.*
 - *A 3-D model should be provided to assist in impact analysis.*
 - *Is the garage designed as passively ventilated (are there areas of grills or other open façade materials that need to be designated on the building elevations)?*
 - *How will snow be stored or otherwise removed from the site (including the courtyard)?*
 - *Is a radon mitigation system anticipated in the new structure?*
- n. Techniques to mitigate visual impact. *See discussions above.*

I hope that you will contact me with any questions you may have about my observations and/or analysis. Looking forward to seeing you at the next hearing (scheduled for next Tuesday night).

Sincerely,
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Boehmer', with a stylized, flowing script.

Clifford Boehmer AIA
President + Principal